

The Random Jottings of Donald Jay from Nelson in Pendle.

Story.

Alice Nutter, a woman whose name would forever be entwined with the dark tale of witchcraft and persecution, had never lived at Roughlee Old Hall, despite the legends that had persisted for over four centuries. In the year 2023, this truth was finally brought to light.

Contrary to popular belief, Alice Nutter's true residence was on the Crowtrees estate, located half a mile to the west of Roughlee Old Hall. Additionally, the riches and estates that had been attributed to her were mere fabrications. While she may have possessed more wealth than her companions in the Well Tower dungeon at Lancaster, any true fortune belonged to her Whitaker family, residing outside the forest.

A crucial aspect of the Alice Nutter legend was the belief that her own family had abandoned her during her trial and allowed her to be prosecuted in order to seize her estates. However, the reality was quite different. Alice's family, the Whitakers, had chosen not to intervene and speak up for her, but it was not for the reasons people assumed. They did so out of respect for her wishes and because the wealth tied to her name was not rightfully theirs.

Digging further into Alice Nutter's origins, it becomes evident that her maiden name was Alice O'Dick O'Miles. In 1561, a property exchange took place in Roughlee, orchestrated by Miles Nutter, Alice's father. He, along with his wife Elizabeth and his son Richard, surrendered half of a farm property to the use of various individuals, including Alice herself and her brothers James and John Whittaker. The property was intended for Alice and her husband Richard Nutter during their lifetimes, and afterwards, a quarter share was to be allocated to Alice as her dower. The remainder was to go to Richard and his heirs. This farm was possibly the very land on which Roughlee Old Hall was constructed by John Smith.

The question arises: Who exactly was Alice, the wife of Dick O'Miles? Alice hailed from the Whitaker family, which had a long-standing presence in the Padiham region since the thirteenth century. The Whitakers had split into three primary branches: the Whitakers of Holme-in-Cliviger, the Whitakers of Broadclough, and the family of Simonstone. Alice belonged to the Simonstone branch, specifically as one of the five children of Gyles Whitaker of Huncoat. Gyles was a notable figure in his own right, having served as constable of Huncoat multiple times and appearing on the Muster Roll, a testament to his significance. Apart from Alice, Gyles had four other children: James, John, Agnes, and Joan.

It comes as no surprise that the Roughlee Nutters and the Huncoat Whitakers became linked through marriage. Despite being approximately five miles apart, the Simonstone Whitakers frequently traded lands within Pendle Forest, forging connections between the families.

However, the most intriguing and tragic figure associated with Roughlee was none other than Alice Nutter herself. In the year 1612, she was accused of witchcraft and subsequently met her untimely end at Lancaster, where she was hanged. Alice was the wife of Richard, the son of Miles Nutter, and together they had a son named Miles, among other children. Regrettably, her paternal name remains unknown.

Alice stood apart from the other accused individuals, as she was described as a "rich woman" with significant wealth, children of promise, and a reputation for good temperament, devoid of envy or malice, as viewed by the common world. The charges brought against her included her alleged presence at the witches' gathering at Malkin Tower and a conspiracy with old Elizabeth Device to murder Henry Mitton of Roughlee due to his refusal to provide a penny to Device. Throughout her trial, Alice staunchly denied her guilt, refusing to confess any wrongdoing or disclose any information, even on the brink of death.

In the end, Alice Nutter met her fate with impenitence, leaving her own children unable to extract any admissions or revelations from her, not even in articulo mortis. Her story,

intertwined with the tragic history of the Pendle Witch Trials, would forever leave an indelible mark on the annals of folklore and dark history, captivating the imaginations of generations to come.

By Donald Jay